

**THE HONORABLE VERNON J. EHLERS**  
**CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, TECHNOLOGY, AND**  
**STANDARDS**  
**HEARING ON**

*National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Organic Acts*

Thursday July 15, 2004

**Mr. Ehlers' Opening Statement**

I want to welcome all of you to today's hearing on legislation creating an organic act for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (better known as NOAA). Your first question may be what is an organic act? And why does NOAA, an agency that has been around for 30 years, need one?

An organic act defines the overall mission and functions of an agency. As an example, my bill, H.R. 4546 states that the mission of NOAA is: (1) to understand and predict changes in the Earth's oceans and atmosphere; (2) to conserve and manage coastal, ocean, and Great Lake ecosystems; and (3) to educate the public about these topics. The bill also describes the specific functions NOAA should carry out to fulfill its mission, such as issuing weather forecasts and warnings.

NOAA was created in 1970 by then-President Nixon through an executive order. This executive order transferred various oceanic and atmospheric functions from other agencies into the new NOAA, and placed it in the Department of Commerce. However, the order did not provide an overall mission for the agency.

After roughly 35 years our nation has again undertaken a broad review of our ocean policy. The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, which released its preliminary report this past April, made more than 200 recommendations to Congress. During a Science Committee hearing on the report, the Commission's chair, Admiral Watkins, and all the other witnesses said one of the most important steps for Congress to take is the creation and passage of a NOAA organic act.

I agreed with their sentiment. In fact, we had already been working on a NOAA organic act for a year. And after consultation with many experts, I introduced H.R. 4546. This bill strikes a balance between providing Congressional direction on NOAA's mission and allowing the Administration the flexibility to adapt to future needs. H.R. 4546 as introduced does not include any reference to fisheries or resource management at NOAA because those topics are under the jurisdiction of the Resources Committee. I look forward to working with my colleagues on that Committee to pass a truly comprehensive organic act for NOAA.

Our discussion today will focus on how NOAA should be organized. For example, should the current line office structure be maintained or should the agency be reorganized around ecosystem-based management, as suggested by the Ocean Commission? Another important question is how best to coordinate research and science at NOAA.

We will also hear testimony about the Administration's proposed NOAA organic act, which I introduced with my colleague from Maryland, Mr. Gilchrest, at the request of the Administration. I should note that Mr. Gilchrest, who is a valuable Member of the Science Committee, is also chair of the Resources Subcommittee on Fisheries, which is the other major Committee with NOAA jurisdiction.

We are here today to learn from our witnesses how they believe we can best define and organize NOAA to better fulfill its mission. I look forward to hearing from them on how to accomplish this goal, and I especially want to receive their comments on our efforts as contained in H.R. 4546.

I would like to request unanimous consent that two letters of support for H.R. 4546 are made part of the record. One is from the ocean community and the other is from the weather community.